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THE VALUE  
OF THE  
STUDY OF HEBREW FOR A MINISTER.

BY  
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# THE VALUE OF THE STUDY OF HEBREW FOR A MINISTER.

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An eminent English scientific lecturer is reported to have said to his students, "Above all, avoid that question which ignorance too often addresses to genius, What is the use of your work?" Science, in his opinion, deserves to be pursued for its own sake, and it is degraded when its advocates are obliged to meet the question of utility. In a similar manner, a distinguished professor in Germany began his lectures on the history of philosophy by saying, What good is to be derived from this study? It is like art, a *περιττόν*, a luxury, not a necessary, for man, a *studium liberale*, having no end out of itself, but being its own end. It might seem somewhat extravagant if one should urge the study of Hebrew on the ground of its being a luxury for man, although in former times *A Garden Bed of Spices* was the title given to a work on Hebrew grammar, and *Deliciæ Hebræo-Philologicæ* was the designation of a treatise on Hebrew philology.\* The question, however, is put in regard to every branch of knowledge that claims attention in this age, *Cui bono?* and we propose, therefore, to point out some of the advantages arising from an acquaintance with this department of learning, although it must be borne in mind that everything is not to be judged by its tangible and immediate uses; for the question, "What is it good for?" as has been said, would abolish the rose and be triumphantly answered by the cabbage.

\* See also Bibliander, Adami, *Deliciæ ebræo-homileticæ, d.i., Ergetzlichkeiten der ebräischer Sprache auff der Cantzel zu gebrauchen.* Dresden. 1707.

It seems surprising at the present day that such marked prominence was once given to this language. From the first settlement of the country until a little more than a half-century ago an acquaintance with it was considered essential to a liberal education, and undergraduates acquired more familiarity with it than is now gained by divinity students. At Harvard College, under the presidency of Dunster, no one could receive his first degree unless he was able to render the original of the Old and New Testament into the Latin tongue, and Hebrew was then printed without the vowel signs. In 1708, at morning prayers, all the students were ordered to read a verse out of the Old Testament from the Hebrew into Greek, except the Freshmen, who were allowed to use their English Bibles. Orations in Hebrew were spoken at Commencement; and Judge Sewall in his diary, 1685 (Vol. I. p. 85) alludes to one by Nathanael Mather, and adds, "Mr. President, after giving the degrees, made an oration in praise of academical studies and degrees, Hebrew tongue."\* Even during President Kirkland's administration, the custom of students delivering Hebrew orations was continued, and the last of these was given in 1817 by one who is still living, and who says that it was received by the audience with roars of laughter. The study of this language was obligatory upon all, regardless of what was to be their destination in life; for it was held, as a vote of the President and Fellows of Harvard College declared, that "the knowledge of it is necessary to the Divine, useful to the Scholar, and reputable to the Gentleman; and it is, there-

\* Governor William Bradford prefixed to his *History of Plymouth* eight pages of Hebrew roots with English explanations, giving the following introduction: "Though I am growne aged, yet I have had a longing desire to see, with my owne eyes, something of that most ancient language and holy tongue, in which the Law and Oracles of God were writ. And though I cañot attaine to much herein, yet I am refreshed to have seen some glimpse hereof; (as Moyses saw the land of Canan a farr of). My aime and desire is, to see how the words and phrases lye in the holy text; and to discerne somewhat of the same, for my owne contente."

fore, required that the students of the University be instructed in the elements and first principles of this simple, ancient, and venerable tongue." Edward Everett, who belonged to the class of 1811, referring in an after-dinner speech to his Hebrew studies in college, mentioned that a classmate being called upon unexpectedly to recite from the Psalter, and knowing nothing of the lesson, availed himself of a Latin translation which was printed on the same page, but began at the wrong line, and made a misfit all the way down. President John Adams, who founded the Adams Academy in Quincy, desired that a school-master should be procured for it who was conversant with "the Greek and Latin languages," and also, "if thought advisable, the Hebrew, not to make learned Hebricians, but to teach such young men as choose to learn it the Hebrew alphabet, the rudiments of the Hebrew grammar and lexicon, that in after life they may pursue the study to what extent they please." For admission to the Divinity School of Harvard University from 1834 to 1839, candidates were required to pass an examination in Hebrew grammar, and in the first ten chapters of Deuteronomy; and when Dr. Palfrey was the Dean, the classes recited in Hebrew during the winter by candle-light before breakfast.

The estimation in which this language was held and the attention that was universally paid to it were due undoubtedly to the fact that it was regarded as a sacred tongue, the primitive dialect of mankind, the mother of all languages, since, according to Genesis xi. 1, it was the only speech in existence before the confusion at Babel. It was this which, it was believed, Adam spoke in Paradise, and which the saints will use in heaven. It was even supposed to be the language of the Almighty, which he employed in his com-

munications with men and angels.\* To-day, however, no study is held in less esteem, or is more spoken against. From having been greatly overrated, it is now greatly underrated. It is regarded as antiquated, unnecessary, and worthless, and there are those who would endorse the sentiment of Thoreau, that it is more important to know slang than Hebrew. "Don't write in Hebrew, I had enough of *that* long ago," was the conclusion of a note which was received by the writer of this essay from one of the ministers of his own denomination.

Among those who manifest a disinclination and repugnance to this study, there are some who do not desire a thorough education, who are satisfied with moderate attainments, who prefer those topics of thought which require least effort, who object to whatever is to them uninteresting, and who are, therefore, opposed to Hebrew, Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and in some cases to Systematic Theology. These persons, if studying law, would demur to the drudgery of examining precedents, and, if members of a scientific school, would protest against what is required in mathematics. So college students sometimes burn one text-book and bury another, the study of which has been distasteful and irksome. But if only those branches are to be chosen which are agreeable and attractive, many important subjects must be dropped both in the preparatory and the professional schools. Others again have no taste or capacity for the acquisition of languages; they do not believe in the value of a study of the classics, and in the benefit to be derived from reading in the original the great orators and poets: but they think that the time that is thus spent should rather be devoted to modern philosophy and science.

\* Dove, *De lingue hebræe excellentia, qua Deus ipse, primi nostri parentes in Paradiso usi sunt.* Witteb. 1627.



It is to be regretted that this study is usually begun so late, after the student has graduated from college, and when he is less disposed to learn the forms and rules of a grammar and to turn over the leaves of a lexicon. On account of the strangeness of the characters, considerable time must elapse before he can read with facility and accuracy, and the teacher is often reminded of the recitations in that school described by the poet, where —

“Each name was called as many various ways  
As pleased the reader’s ear on different days,  
So that the weather, or the ferule’s stings,  
Colds in the head, or fifty other things,  
Transformed the helpless Hebrew thrice a week  
To guttural Pequot or resounding Greek,  
The vibrant accent skipping here and there,  
Just as it pleased invention or despair.”

In Germany, Hebrew is taught in the upper classes of the gymnasia, so that when the scholar enters the university he has not to begin the alphabet, but all the preliminary work is left behind. In Scotland, the practice is spreading of demanding from students a considerable knowledge of Hebrew before they enter the theological classes. The General Theological Seminary of the Episcopalians in New York is the only one known to us in this country, where, according to their published circular, an acquaintance with the primary elements of this language is required of applicants for admission.

Many think that Hebrew is unnecessary, since they can get along without it; and that it is a waste of time to study a dead language, which will be so readily forgotten. It is true that there are successful ministers who know nothing of Hebrew; and that many a one, if he should attempt to look out his text in the Old Testament in the original,

would acknowledge, with Henry Ward Beecher, that it would take him most of the week to ascertain what it was. The question, indeed, has been asked, What has *hic, hæc, hoc*, to do with the conversion of the world, and what connection is there between an intimate knowledge of Greek and "saving souls"? It is not to be denied that a clergyman possibly can do without an understanding of Greek and Latin, German and French, chemistry and physics, mathematics, history, and philosophy; but the question for every man is not, with how little he may be able to get along, but how much he can acquire. The minister should desire to have the widest range of learning. Knowledge is power. This knowledge, to be sure, may be forgotten; for who remembers all that he has been taught in any science?—and yet he does not regret that he has been taught it. Even if we cannot instantly recall what we have once thoroughly learned, we still are benefited by having learned it; we shall always be able to recover it, and it will come back to us with increased interest and value. There are not many graduates who could at once pass the examination for admission to college; but this does not prove that their studies there were not desirable and useful.

The difficulty of acquiring this language has been exaggerated. It requires far less time and labor than Greek or German. The grammatical forms are comparatively few and simple. The number of Hebrew and Chaldee words in the Old Testament is not large, since they may be included in a small lexicon of less than three hundred duodecimo pages, while nearly all the fundamental roots may be found in five hundred and sixty-four verses of the book of Psalms. There have been many accomplished Hebraists who have been self-taught. Julia E. Smith, when over seventy years of age, translated the whole Bible into English in one year and



seven months, having no other helps than a Hebrew and Greek grammar and dictionary. A book on "The Proper Names of the Old Testament" arranged alphabetically from the original text has been published in England by a lady, who undertook the work as a means of making the study of Hebrew more profitable and interesting to herself. Dr. J. W. Etheridge, in the preface to his "Jerusalem and Tiberias," says that his daughter began to learn Hebrew when five years of age, more in the way of a little pleasant occasional pastime than as a task; and that this practice persevered in, with the lapse of months and years gave her, as she almost insensibly and yet rapidly acquired the language, the ability to read the word of God in that form in which he first gave it to mankind; and this did not at all interfere with the attainment by her of other accomplishments. In view of these facts, it is surprising to hear ministers of religion disparage this study. Perhaps they never applied themselves to it with the same earnestness and persistency which they brought to other subjects; or they were in the beginning prejudiced against it; or they never fully mastered the elementary forms, and consequently never made much progress afterwards; or the work was not made as interesting as it might have been. No one certainly could have listened to Ewald and witnessed his enthusiasm for his work without catching some of his ardor and zeal, and of his admiration for the authors he was expounding. Moses Stuart inspired the students at Andover with such interest in their studies that, as has been said by one of them, after some of his exercises they would return at once to their rooms and eagerly open their grammars and lexicons, in order to continue the investigations which they had begun. Those persons are not recognized as competent authorities upon any subject who are confessedly ignorant in regard to it;

whereas all who are best acquainted with the language under consideration testify to its utility and emphatically recommend it to others.

It is a significant fact that Hebrew constitutes a part of the curriculum which is laid down in every theological school that has a high standard of scholarship. In England, Scotland, Germany, and in our own country, no one can obtain his degree in divinity, unless he has made those attainments which that degree represents. A school where this language is not studied is considered as being of a lower grade and adapted to those who are of inferior ability, its friends often think that they must apologize for its deficiency, while its best students feel that they are not receiving a complete and solid education. Now the leading men of all churches in all lands would not demand that the time of those who are preparing for the ministry should be devoted to this pursuit, unless it were useful and important. The judgment of the faculties of theology in the various universities with regard to this matter is surely entitled to respect. Nay, those denominations that formerly neglected this study have of late insisted upon it, and in some seminaries it is now continued during three years. When the standard of theological education has thus everywhere risen, it will not be to the credit of any institution or any religious body which shall lower it. The ministry will cease to be a learned profession, and will lose much of its prestige, whenever the study of the languages in which the Scriptures were written shall be abandoned. If a knowledge of the Old Testament in the original shall be deemed unnecessary, so also in time will that of the New. But if a clergyman should know nothing of Greek, he would not be on an equality with many of the best educated persons who are about him; and he would not in most cases hold a very high

place in a community if he were incapable of serving as a member of a committee on an academy or high school, and were inferior to the ministers of other churches, and were more ignorant than some of the boys and girls of his own congregation.\*

— This subject commends itself to scholars on philological considerations. There is great value in the study of language, which reveals the manifold phases and workings of the human mind, and which surely is of not less consequence than the study of matter. Words are the expression of a people's thoughts and feelings; and their character and experience, their moral and religious ideas, as well as the signal incidents in their history, are best preserved in their speech. This is illustrated by the words Hebrew, Israelite, and Jew; by the names of the Deity,—Elohim, Jahveh, Jahveh Sabaoth; by the terms which denote sin, righteousness, truth, the abode of the departed, and many others. And there is a special benefit to be derived from the knowledge of such an Oriental tongue. Our present linguistic education is confined to the ancient classical and the modern European languages. But these all belong to the same family, and it is desirable for us to have some acquaintance with one which is the product of a distinct race, is written in a different manner, has forms of construction peculiarly its own, and in many respects is the opposite of the others. Here we enter a new sphere, and observe new phenomena and laws. Here we see the strength and power of condensation of a language, and we observe how, with a few well-chosen terms, a whole picture is graphically set before us, as in the blessing of Jacob and the song of Deborah, in the life-like description of the horse in the book of Job, and in

\* See the article by Bonamy Price in the *Contemporary Review* for March, 1879, *On the Worth of a Classical Education*.

the beautiful characterization of the good woman in Proverbs. He who would know anything about comparative philology, and the possibility of tracing all words to a common source,—a subject which has been thought by some to have an important bearing on the question of the unity of the human race,—must not be ignorant of Hebrew. The Semitic nations are radically diverse from the Aryan nations, and we need to study their language, that their Eastern sentiment may complement our Western thought. We need to combine the influences of Hebraism and Hellenism, and join the *talith* of Shem with the *pallium* of Japheth.

The study of Hebrew is to be recommended on broad and general grounds of culture. Its alphabet stands the nearest to hieroglyphic or picture writing, and our own as well as the alphabets of Europe are derived from it. It is the key to a literature which in some respects has never been surpassed, which carries us back to a very early period, and the golden age of which was completed before Pindar, Herodotus, and Plato had been born. The opinion of the world has been pronounced in reference to these books, which have stimulated and fed the finest intellects, and have exerted an incalculable influence on mankind. If Æschylus and Euripides are worth reading in the original, are not likewise Isaiah and the book of Psalms? The nearer we come to the minds of these exalted writers by reading the *ipsissima verba* in which they expressed their thoughts, the higher will be our appreciation, and the more we shall be inspired by them. The study of words and the effort to determine their exact meaning tend also to foster habits of carefulness, accuracy, and thoroughness, and serve as a check against that spirit of rash and hasty generalization which is observable in some persons who are devoted only to philosophical and scientific inquiries.

Some knowledge of this language, moreover, is necessary if we would fully understand many terms which are occurring constantly in daily life, and which have a new significance when we are aware of their etymology. Who suspects that the words *myrrh*, *cinnamon*, *cassia*, *sack*, *cane*, *camel*, *cherub*, *seraph*, *cabalistic*, *shibboleth*, *satanic*, *jot*, *jubilee*, *babel*, are strictly Hebrew in their origin? How many expressions are used in our public worship and in the reading of the Scriptures which are almost meaningless because they retain unchanged their primitive Hebrew form! Such are *amen*, *hallelujah*, *hosanna*, *selah*, *shekinah*, and others. The fundamental idea of the Sabbath is to be found in the verb from which that word is derived; and to one who is aware that Pharisee comes from a root which means "to separate," the very pronunciation of the word gives the character of the person, and, as soon as it is uttered, we see the separatist, and can almost hear him say, "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou." There are also various proper names that are familiar to us, which become much more interesting when we perceive their literal import, and can give their interpretation. Thus Nathanael and Theodore, Solomon and Frederic, Hosea, Joshua, and Jesus are equivalents. There are compounds of *Ab*, father, such as abbot, abbess, abbey; of *Beth*, house, like Bethel, house of God, Bethlehem, house of bread, Bethesda, house of mercy, Bethsaida, house of fish, Bethany, house of dates, Bethphage, house of figs, Bethabara, place of ford; of *Ben*, son, as Benjamin, son of good fortune; of *El*, God, as Elisha, Elijah, Eliezer, Elisabeth, and also Samuel, Nathanael, Lemuel, Daniel, Ezekiel, Emanuel, Gamaliel, Joel, Michael; of *Jah*, Jehovah, as Josiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Uzziah, Zachariah, Micah, Abijah, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and others, which have a signification of their own that is lost to those who are unable to tell of what



parts they are compounded. Besides these, there are Hebrew words which we meet with in English dictionaries and commentaries, in theological reviews, and on coins and medals, as well as on the Jewish synagogues in our cities. Not all who frequent the General Theological Library in Boston can read the Hebrew motto upon its seal; and few who have gazed at the statue of Moses by Michael Angelo, unless their attention has been particularly called to the matter, have imagined that the horns which are placed upon his head, and which have been falsely supposed to denote strength or a sort of halo, are the consequence of a mistranslation of a Hebrew word by the authors of the Latin Vulgate.

An acquaintance with Hebrew is important for the minister because it is the original of the Old Testament. He will have occasion often to take the text of his discourse from this portion of the Scriptures; he will be called to read from it in the services of the sanctuary, and to expound it to teachers and Bible-classes. If questioned as to the true meaning of a passage, it should be as mortifying for him to confess his ignorance in regard to it, as it would be for an instructor to acknowledge that he was uninformed with respect to the subjects or books which he was appointed to teach. It has been seriously questioned whether lawyers and physicians are not better acquainted with the leading authorities in their respective professions than clergymen are with their chief authorities in religion. "To teach what you are ignorant of!" exclaims Jerome to some of the sciolists of his day. "Nay (for I cannot but speak with indignation), not to have knowledge enough to know that you are ignorant!" Every minister who has but a slight acquaintance with Hebrew will admit its value in enabling him to look out his text, ascertain its proper sense, bring

forth a meaning from it which may have been obscured, making inferences and applications which give force and completeness to the sermon, and proving that he is master of his subject. A clergyman who is a scholar will command respect and influence which would otherwise be denied him. He who has a just conception of what his office requires will not be satisfied until he has fully qualified himself for it. And in proportion as he believes that God spake unto the fathers by the prophets, and is convinced that these great seers were not deluded when they declared that the word of the Lord had come to them, and that against their will they had been called by the Holy Spirit, must their writings appear to him to be something more than secular literature, since by the testimony of the ages and by the verdict of the most enlightened nations of the present day they have no superior, and deserve the place which has been accorded them in the Book of books. The critical study of this volume in the language in which it was written will reveal a wealth of meaning and a beauty and power of expression which would otherwise be unknown, and will make it a new book to us; our reverence for it will increase, and as new light dawns upon us, and we are elevated and stirred by its grand utterances, we shall say with the Psalmist, "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."\*

These results will not follow from the reading of a translation. Words are not convertible from one language into another, as foreign coins may be exchanged for those of

\*Kalisch, the author of the well-known commentary on the Old Testament, after the completion of his fourth volume was seized with a severe illness, and, as a first effort after his partial recovery, he published a treatise on Numbers XXII. to XXIV., which he calls an exquisite episode and one of the choicest master-pieces of universal literature. "Love of such a subject," he says, "could not fail to uphold even a wavering strength, and to revive an often drooping courage. The author is indebted to these pursuits for many hours of the highest enjoyment, and he feels compelled to express his profound gratitude for having been permitted to accomplish even this modest enterprise."

one's own country. Idiomatic phrases, instances of alliteration and paronomasia, cannot be transferred to a different form of speech. Sometimes a particle will have a peculiar effect upon a sentence, which can be represented by no equivalent word; and there may be several vocables that represent distinct things in one language, for which there is but a single corresponding appellative in another. There are many terms which from their origin or associations have acquired a signification that is lost when they are rendered literally into another tongue. Such are the words which in our Bible are translated *fool*, *peace*, *name*, *wisdom*, *soul*, *hell*, which repeatedly stand for something very different in the original. Poetry, especially, suffers most when it must be converted into prose or verse. Who can fairly judge of Homer or Dante who knows them only through the medium of versifiers? Translations have been well compared to "champagne in decanters;" for the flavor and sparkle of the original are gone when it has once been poured into another receptacle. No one can penetrate fully into the meaning of an author, and understand his thoughts and his spirit, except by a study of his language. There are ideas and associations which we have connected with the Old Testament that do not properly belong to it, and we can discover its true sense only by reading it in the original. The author of the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus begs the reader to pardon him where he has failed to come short of some words which he has labored to interpret: "For the same things uttered in Hebrew and translated into another tongue have not the same force in them; and not only these things, but the law itself, and the prophets, and the rest of the books, have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language."

But who would be willing to accept a copy of the work of



a great master when he can have the original? Even if it were faithfully done, we should miss the delicate shading, the unmistakable touch and coloring of the artist. And what copy shall we take, for there are numerous ones by various scholars, Jewish and Christian, which differ widely? Will we be satisfied also with a translation of the New Testament in lieu of the Greek, as on the same principles we should be? How, then, can we object to the Roman Catholic who depends upon his Latin version? \* But our authorized English version is notoriously inadequate, so that a new translation has been called for, and is now in preparation. The readings in King James's Bible often give no sense, or a false one. What idea is derived from the words, "Song of Degrees," or from such passages as the following: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (Psalms xvi. 2, 3). "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools" (Psalms lxxxiv. 5, 6). "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth" (Psalms cx. 3). What would the average reader understand to be the meaning of these verses: "He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death. The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant: even the waters forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from

\* Luther said: "Die Ebräer trinken aus der Brunnquelle; die Griechen aber aus den Wässerlein, die aus der Quelle fließen; die Lateinischen aber aus der Pfützen." Yet it should not be forgotten that there have been among the Roman Catholics eminent Hebraists, like Richard Simon, Geddes, de Rossi, Jahn, and Hug; and it is worthy of mention that Dr. J. J. Wagner, Professor at Bamberg, published a tract, *Von der Wichtigkeit der Hebräischen Sprache für den katholischen Theologen*.

men" (Job xxviii. 3, 4). "Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth. He taketh it with his eyes: his nose pierceth through snares" (Job xl. 23, 24). In many instances, an entirely erroneous impression is conveyed by our version. Thus in Genesis i. 2, where we read "the spirit of God moved," the verb should be translated *brooded*, as it is correctly rendered by Milton:—

"Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant."

In Genesis ii. 2, it is said, "And on the seventh day God *ended* his work," which implies that he worked on the seventh day, which is contrary to the narrative, and which led the Seventy, as well as the authors of the Samaritan and Syriac versions, deliberately to alter the text, and to substitute the words "sixth day." In Genesis iii. 8, we read, "And they heard the *voice* of the Lord God walking," although the Deity had not yet spoken, and it is the "sound of footsteps" that is meant. In Genesis iv. 15, it is recorded that "the Lord set a mark upon Cain," implying some brand-mark which was stamped upon him as a disgrace; whereas the preposition should be translated "for," and the context shows that this sign was given for his benefit, in order that he might not be killed. In Leviticus xvi. 8, it is commanded that Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scape-goat; but the last word is clearly an antithesis to "the Lord," and it should be rendered "for Azazel," which was the name of an evil spirit. Great misunderstanding has arisen from our translation of Judges i. 19, which relates that the Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley

because they had chariots of iron, which is supposed to give a very narrow conception of the power of the Deity; but the word "he" should be rendered "it," or "they," as referring to the tribe of Judah, and then all misconception would be removed. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, it has been supposed, is taught in Job xix. 26, "In my flesh I shall see God"; but the preposition, taken in connection with the previous verb "destroy," really signifies "free from," "without," "stripped of," and thus the very opposite belief is here inculcated.\* A strange impression is given by the phrase in Job xxxi. 35, "that mine adversary had written a book"; whereas the writer expresses a wish that his adversary would write down the charge which he brings against him. In Psalm xvi. 9, 10, our version says, "My flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"; but the Psalmist sang, "My flesh dwelleth (or shall dwell) in safety; for thou wilt not leave (or abandon) my soul to Sheol, thou wilt not give thy pious ones to see the pit, (or the grave)," thus expressing his confidence that God would watch over his life and preserve him from death. Psalm xix. 3 declares, as we have it, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard"; but this should be rendered, "They have no speech nor language, and their voice is not heard, yet their line (or strain) is gone

\*That this passage refers to the author's seeing God in spirit in a future life, is the view of Ewald, Delitzsch, Hupfeld, Oehler, Dillmann, Zöckler, Umbreit (who once held a different opinion), Dr. Davidson, and others. Dr. Noyes maintained that the expectation of Job refers to a time before his death, when his body would be without flesh, having been wasted away to a mere skeleton. But the verb translated *destroy* will not allow this interpretation; and Dillmann justly says that a skeleton must at least have flesh on it in order to be capable of life (see ver. 20), and that the expression, "without my flesh," would not in any language mean emaciated or wasted away.

forth through all the world," as Addison has correctly translated in his well-known paraphrase of this Psalm : —

“What though in solemn silence all  
Move round this dark terrestrial ball ;  
What though nor real voice nor sound  
Amidst their radiant orbs be found ;  
In Reason’s ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice.”

The thirteenth verse of this Psalm as it stands in our Bible, “I shall be innocent from the great transgression,” suggests to the mind some vague, mysterious, and awful crime, which is not at all warranted by the original ; for we should simply read, “I shall be innocent from great transgression.” In like manner, if the indefinite article were substituted in the fourth verse of the twenty-third Psalm, it would corresponds more exactly with the Hebrew, and at the same time indicate that it is not the valley of death, but a dark vale in life, that was in the mind of the poet, as the contrasting images in verses two and four represent. In Psalm xlv. 8, a much truer and better sense will be obtained if, instead of “out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad,” we read, “out of the ivory palaces stringed instruments make thee glad.” Many beautiful and consolatory religious pieces have been suggested by the line in Psalm cxxvii. 2: “For so he giveth his beloved sleep.” But the writer has no reference to the sleep of death ; he is urging trust in God, and the folly of being over-anxious for the morrow. Vain is it, he says, for men to rise up early and retire late to rest, eating the bread of wearisome labor and sorrow ; for so He giveth it to his beloved even while they sleep. Proverbs xxxi. 10, ff., according to our Bible, contains a eulogium on the “virtuous woman” ; but this is a misnomer for which the wise man who wrote the description is not responsible,

since it is not the virtue, but the ability, of this model Jewish wife which he commends. In Canticles i. 13, a very unfortunate mistake has been made by our translators, rendering "he" instead of "it," which grossly perverts the sentiment of the maiden who compares her beloved to a bundle of myrrh which rests on her bosom.\*

The foregoing are only a few of the instances which might be cited to show that our common version is not to be implicitly relied upon. But even the new revision which is expected will not make a knowledge of Hebrew superfluous. For in the first place, many passages which a large number of the revisers might wish to change may remain unaltered, since no modification can be made in the text of our Bible unless it shall be approved by two-thirds of the whole company. They will not adopt certain alterations which might be thought desirable if an entirely new translation were to be given to the public. They will not amend the title of the Old Testament, although it should be the Old Covenant; and they will not substitute Jehovah for Lord, notwithstanding that the former is the proper designation, which was not pronounced by the Jews, although that would seem to be no valid reason why it should not be used by Christians. Moreover, the occurrence of the word "Lord," in the Old Testament signifying Jehovah, and in the New Testament indicating Christ, tends to create confusion, and Psalm cx. 1 would be made much more intelligible if, instead of "The Lord said unto my Lord," the clause should be rendered literally, "Jehovah said unto my lord (or sovereign)," since it is the king who is about going forth to war that is addressed. Neither will the Revision Committee be

\*This is the interpretation adopted by the Jewish scholars, Mendelssohn, Fürst, Philippon, Cahen, Leaser, and also by Luther, Ewald, Delitzsch, Zöckler, Rosenmüller, Kamphausen (in Bunsen's *Bibelwerk*), Ginsburg, Fausset, Kitto, Kingsbury, and others.



at liberty to modify the present division of chapters, although the first three verses of the second chapter in Genesis should be included in the first chapter, since they form the conclusion of one account of the creation, and another narrative begins immediately afterwards. So also Psalms xlii. and xliii. should be joined together, since they are properly one Psalm; and Isaiah xiii. and xiv., lii. and liii., should be similarly united. And in respect to such emendations as may be adopted by the Commission, discussion will arise, reasons for the changes will be asked for, and it will be necessary to refer to the original Scriptures to see whether these things be so. There will be the same need then that there is now of a knowledge that will enable one to form an intelligent judgment in regard to controverted passages, if he would see with his own eyes and not take his opinions at second hand.

There are also other questions, such as those which involve the relation of Scripture to science; questions of doctrine, such as whether immortality is taught in the Old Testament; questions of ethics, like that which turns upon the meaning of the several words that denote wine,—for the discussion of all of which a knowledge of Hebrew is indispensable. But besides these, there are very important critical questions which are pressing for solution at the present day. These questions relate to the age and composition of the Pentateuch, to the Messianic and the Maccabean Psalms, to the authorship of Isaiah, chapters xl. to lxvi., to the unity of Zechariah, the date of the book of Daniel, the formation of the canon, and other similar topics. For the determination of these matters, there is needed especially a familiarity with the internal evidence, with the peculiarities of style of the different writers, with the derivation and meaning of words, and the use of idioms. Amid the contradictory opinions

that are advanced by various schools, which shall we adopt, and how can we come to any satisfactory conclusion unless we are able in some measure to decide upon the merits of each case? We ought at least to be qualified to appreciate and weigh the arguments which are brought forward in these discussions, in order that we may have good and sufficient reasons for our own belief, and may be able to speak understandingly to others. We need a knowledge of Hebrew to enable us to test the various theories that are put forth, and to refute those which are utterly baseless. Many a wild hypothesis has been hastily embraced and promulgated by those who were fascinated by its novelty, but who were utterly ignorant of its inherent falsity. It seems to be deemed in some quarters altogether unnecessary for one to be acquainted with the original of the Old Testament who undertakes to discuss questions that are intimately connected with it. But what should we think of an individual who should presume to write a work upon the Homeric poems who was unable to read Greek; or who should treat of the plays that have been ascribed to Plautus without a knowledge of Latin; or who should argue about the authorship of the letters of Junius, when he could not understand the English language, and knew them only in a translation? Such a person might speak very positively and dogmatically, because he has no doubts, and knows not the difficulties of the subject. But this would not entitle him to be considered an authority. Whoever has not prepared himself by a thorough study of the original sources for a full comprehension of these subjects in all their bearings is not qualified to pronounce upon them, and might well hesitate before assuming to be a teacher of others.

A knowledge of Hebrew is also necessary for the understanding of the New Testament, the language of which is

not classic but Hellenistic Greek, abounding in Hebraisms, since it was written by men who were imbued with the ideas and phraseology of the Old Testament. There are Hebrew utterances of Jesus, in the Aramaic form, such as those which he used to the daughter of Jairus (Mark v. 41), and those which he breathed in his last moments upon the cross (Matthew xxvii. 46). In the Gospels and Epistles there are quotations from the Old Testament which we must compare with the original (since they often vary from it) if we would comprehend them. As examples may be mentioned John x. 34, 35, and Hebrews x. 5 (compare Psalm xl. 6). There are Hebrew words in the New Testament, some of them in Chaldaic form, which are printed in Greek letters. Such are Ἀβδδὼν, Ἀκελδαμά, Ἀρμαγεδὼν, Γαββαθᾶ γέεννα, Γεθσημανῆ, Γολγοθᾶ, Κηφᾶς, κοριθαῖν, μαρνανθά, Μεσσίας, πᾶσχα, ῥαββί, ῥακά, and others. There are also many expressions which are thoroughly Hebraic. According to Jewish usage, "name" and "soul" often stand for "person"; and hence we find such phrases as "that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John iii. 23), and "let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Romans xiii. 1). We read also of children of the bride-chamber, children of the resurrection, children of disobedience, children of light and of darkness, children of the kingdom and of the wicked one, and also of the son of peace, the son of perdition, the son of consolation, and the sons of thunder, which indicate unmistakably their origin. We meet with such idioms as "to see life," "to see death," "they shall be called the children of God," for "they shall be the children of God," and the like. Since the Hebrews had no generic terms, they often employ paraphrases, as in Genesis i. 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," by which evidently is meant the universe, since the creation of the heavens is



stated in verses 7, 8, and of the earth in verses 9, 10. Jesus follows this usage in Matthew v. 18, where he says, "Till heaven and earth pass"; xi. 25, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth"; xxiv. 35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away." The style of the Hebrew writers was very pictorial, and Jesus and his apostles frequently use the word "behold," and the evangelists paint for us the scenes which they describe by giving every detail, and saying, "He arose and came to his father," "He opened his mouth and taught them," "He sent messengers before his face," "He answered and said," "And the eyes of all were fastened on him." There are many grammatical constructions which are peculiarly Hebraistic, such as the use of the particle *ei*, "if," in solemn asseverations, there being an ellipsis of the words, "God do so to me," which may have been indicated by some gesture, but which in reading must be supplied. Numerous other instances might be adduced, if it were practicable; but we will only add that many points of interest in the New Testament escape the attention of the reader who is not familiar with Hebrew, as in Matthew xxiii. 2, where the paronomasia used by Jesus is lost entirely in the Greek, since, in saying that the Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, he must have employed the words *Mosheh* and *Moshab*. A knowledge of Hebrew alone can furnish us with an explanation of many passages in the New Testament. Thus the statement in 1 Corinthians viii. 4, "An idol is nothing in the world," is far more expressive when we are aware that the Greek word *εἰδωλον* really stands for the Hebrew term which is used contemptuously of the heathen deities, and may be translated "godling" or "no god" (Psalm xcvi. 5). So Galatians v. 14, has a new significance when we remember that the Hebrew name of the Decalogue is the "*Ten Words*," and notice that Paul declares that "all

the law is fulfilled in *one* word.” The phrase “hem of his garment” in Matthew ix. 20, is an error of our translators, which originated in their taking *κράσπεδον* in its usual Greek sense, as “edge, border, hem”; whereas in this passage it is used to denote the *Tsitsith*, and signifies the fringe or tassel which the Israelites wore on the corners of certain garments (Numbers xv. 38). The famous controversy about *ἐστὶ* in connection with the doctrines of transubstantiation and consubstantiation appears a waste of words to one who knows that the copula is usually not expressed in Hebrew, so that probably Jesus never used it at the time of the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

The example and testimony of many scholars might be adduced in favor of the study of this language. Augustine urged the importance of it from a consciousness of his own shortcomings. Jerome went to great trouble and expense in securing the services of a Jew to help him in his Hebrew studies. Luther said that his knowledge of Hebrew was limited, yet that he would not part with it for untold gold. Melanchthon declared that the little he knew of Hebrew he esteemed of the greatest value on account of the judgment he was enabled to form in regard to religion (*propter iudicium de Religione*). Milton devoted several hours every morning to the study of the Scriptures in Hebrew, he recommends it in his treatise on Education (*Prose Works*, III. 473), and his own writings both in prose and poetry attest how much he was indebted to that study. Coleridge used to read ten or twelve verses of Hebrew every evening, ascertaining the exact meaning of every substantive; and he repeatedly expressed his surprise and pleasure at finding that in nine cases out of ten the bare primary sense, if literally rendered, threw great additional light on the text. (*Table Talk*, p. 86.) Bunsen wrote to his son in 1840, “My

good boy, do learn Hebrew well,—else you will continue unripe as long as you live, in many respects. It is comparatively an easy language, and yet in our time scarcely any one is fluent in it. Only become possessed of the inflections and the common roots; those must be taken by storm.” (Memoirs, I. 561.) The Honorable Robert Lowe, of England, ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was Home Secretary in the ministry of Mr. Gladstone, and at the present time is a member of Parliament for London University, delivered an address on the education of boys, in which he said: “There is one language which I think it is a great pity is almost entirely excluded from school education in England. It is the most ancient, and perhaps the most interesting in itself, of all languages—I mean the Hebrew. It seems to me, I confess, inconceivable how it should happen that so very few of our clergy are acquainted with the Hebrew. I cannot understand how a man can consider himself as having competently mastered the elements of theology when he is not acquainted with that language. It is not merely the knowledge of the language itself, but the light which it throws, and which nothing else can throw, upon the text of the New Testament, for instance. The view a man has, the knowledge that a man gets of the Bible, when he reads it standing on the vantage-ground of a knowledge of Hebrew, is infinitely greater than can be got by taking these books up and passing to them not naturally from the knowledge of the Hebrew of the Old Testament, but from the Greek classics. I hope to see the day when in our schools there will at any rate be an option for the study of Hebrew. Nothing can tend more to develop a thorough and sound knowledge of the Bible, or to make our clergy learned and competent in their vocation.”

There seems to be less reason for the neglect of this study, since it can be so easily kept up. Let one read aloud a few verses regularly every day, let him commit to memory favorite passages, let him familiarize himself with the Hebrew version of the New Testament,\* and he will not only retain his present knowledge, but he will add steadily to the stock which he has gained. The minister can find, if he will, sufficient time for this, if he takes only that which would be devoted to other less profitable pursuits. As he comes into close contact and sympathy with these sacred bards and prophets, his own mind will be filled with their majestic thoughts, and his style will insensibly acquire dignity and strength by familiarity with their matchless compositions. He will have a greater interest in that volume which forms the foundation of the records of our religion, the teachings of which Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, in which we see the first rising of that sun which in Christianity reaches its meridian, and now blesses us with its perfect day.

\*A very convenient, cheap, and excellent edition of the Hebrew New Testament, prepared by Professor Franz Delitzsch, has been recently printed in Leipzig for the British and Foreign Bible Society.

# THE VALUE

OF THE

## STUDY OF HEBREW FOR A MINISTER.

BY

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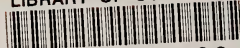








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